



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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artistic merit of course, but the doing of it will have had no small educative value. For to represent an object requires first of all that it be carefully observed, and next trains the hand to be the ready servant of the eye, and both to express the thought of the mind. Or let the child model things in clay, or cut out representations of them in paper. All such exercises—and many of a like kind—form a regular part of Kindergarten instruction, and home instruction of the little ones should be of the character of a less systematic Kindergarten.

And here I will draw my remarks to a close. They have necessarily been very general and somewhat fragmentary owing to the great width of the subject I undertook to speak to you upon, and the limitation of time available for so speaking, but I think the general principle will be clear. Unify your instruction and adapt it to the stage of the child's development, using as your test its power of exciting interest. In that way I think, if too much be not attempted, the child will be best prepared by its home life to enter on the more systematic studies of the school, and there need be no break in the general educative process. Let me then conclude with a short quotation from Plutarch: "A good education, including proper instruction, is the first, second and last principal means by which youth become virtuous and happy; and all other advantages as riches, high birth, beauty, &c., in comparison with such an education are not worth striving after."

OUR GIRLS.

PART II.

ALL intelligent parents would agree, we hope, in recognizing that whatever sphere a daughter may be called upon to occupy, it is their duty to give her as good a preparation for life as possible.

What is the best preparation for life?

The most perfect development of body, mind and character which is possible to the child and within reach of the parents. We must begin by insisting that we can do very little more than aid in developing the natural gifts, activities and faculties with which a child comes into the world. We can teach a child Greek, you object, what amount of Greek does it bring into the world? Yes, we can, perhaps, if it has the faculty of speech, of memory, of observation, of imitation—and even if it has all these we might only find one hundred thousandth of all the children of England to whom it would be possible to teach Greek *effectively*. We can teach Higher Mathematics, how much Euclid and Algebra does a baby bring with it into the world? Well, none, we admit; but it has the faculty of number. It can soon distinguish between one doll and two, or three or four; and this faculty of number, so small in the savage that he can only in some cases count as far as the fingers on one hand, has been developed to such an extent by use and training that prodigies of Senior Wranglers dazzle us every year, and there are born geniuses in mathematics as well as in any of the arts. All the same, we find minds, and those not of a low order, to whom mathematics are absolutely impossible, however inspired the teacher and however great the desire to learn. The power of the teacher is limited—she cannot make this child a musician and that an orator—all she can do is to watch and discover indications of natural gifts, and provide favourable conditions for their development. But the teacher's power to harm is great. She can

prevent the development of an inborn talent by withholding favourable conditions; she may blindly attempt to make a mathematician out of an artist, and find that she has failed to produce the one and spoiled or arrested the growth of the other; she may try to make a thousand children good Latin scholars and find that she has simply wasted their own time and hers, and that while they have been occupied thus fruitlessly their intelligence has gone to sleep and their natural faculties run to waste. All teaching of boys and girls in large numbers, however desirable and inevitable, must have the effect of impeding natural growth, because it is impossible with large numbers to take into consideration the mental differences of children, and their minds differ as much as their faces. For this reason no child should be condemned to spend the whole or even a very large proportion of her little day being taught or learning under direction. When is she to teach *herself*? When is she to learn the things *she* wants to know—when can she indulge her love of music or climbing, of cutting out dolls' clothes, of gardening, painting, or of writing stories? Whatever her gifts or tastes, at once the teacher does her wrong by not providing the necessary conditions, and the first of these conditions is TIME!

"Time," says the conscientious, painstaking teacher, "that is all very well, but *we* want time to teach your girls all that you parents expect them to learn." Yes, no doubt many of the parents are impatient and unreasonable and mistaken.

Here is little Winnie longing to make a new hat for her doll. She has been at school all day and there is some home work, though she is only eleven. She bought a dainty bit of light-blue ribbon on her way home, and has been planning it in her little mind as she walked. After tea she gets out her needle.

"What about your lessons?" says her good mother.

"Oh, mayn't I do this first, it will only take two minutes."

"No, my child, get your work done first, you will have time after."

Obedient Winnie opens her book. Here's what she has to learn by heart. "Any word, phrase, or quotation may be made the subject of discourse, and being a name for itself may thus be used as the subject; as '*If* is a conjunction,' '*Forward* was the cry.' (See page 20, Longman's New

Reader, Standard 5.) Any word, praise or quotation may be made the subject of a discourse, etc.," soon says little Win by heart, not troubling to remember what it all means—(it's so hard, you know)—and proceeds to do her sums.

Why won't they come right? Why does she forget at the end of the first column what to set down and what to carry? Why will a vision of a little lace hat trimmed with blue force itself through the lines of a multiplication table that she knows usually so well? Oh, shortsighted teacher and mother! What comparison is there between the little lesson Winnie has set herself and the lessons you have set her? What is the use of that pedantic rigmarole to a child of eleven? There's only one subject for her to-night—it is a little hat trimmed with blue. There's only one calculation, whether the ribbon will make one bow or two. And see now the wretched sums pushed aside all wrong, and a bright face bending over needle and thread, and nimble fingers making and unmaking and remaking; for the sums may be wrong, but the *hat* must be perfect. What, is there not more benefit to little Win in her self-imposed task calling for delicate manipulation, for taste and design and arrangement; and are not her patience and industry developed over her childish bit of work, and has not she measured and calculated, and found that two bows in a quarter of a yard will just go and none over; and is not her imagination at work as she holds her hat at a distance and her small head on one side, seeing dolly in the hat, and hearing half a dozen little girls call out, "How *awfully* pretty!" The next day Win is in disgrace, but she comforts herself—she has trimmed her hat. In this way *she* prepares for life, not with phrases and quotations, but with little useful arts. And let us note, too, that a struggle has just taken place between the mother and the teacher on the one hand and Nature and the child on the other, and who has won? The child, we see, had other home lessons to do besides those she brought from school. Yes, deep in the little maiden's heart her beneficent teacher Dame Nature planted the irresistible impulse to imitate; the inextinguishable instinct of motherliness, the longing to protect and adorn her doll as afterwards she will protect and adorn her baby. And would you crush these out with grammar and arithmetic?

And Winnie's brother, he has stolen out furtively in the sweet summer evening to mend his rabbit hutch. Drive him in, take his hammer and nails away, burn his bits of wood, "you *naughty* boy!" (or *man*, which?) There's the third declension to get up and two propositions of Euclid, &c., &c., and the cane or "imps" to-morrow if they are not done. And is the boy mastered? Wait a while. A few brief years of authority backed by physical force and he escapes, shaking off his Latin like dust from his feet. He packs up a box of tools and sails away. The winds of heaven dash his declensions from him, the waves rise up and drown the last faint traces of those accusatives in *im* and *em* which cost such fearful struggle, and there soon, he too, unconsciously triumphs, in a log hut of his own building, tilling land of his own clearing, rearing—not rabbits now—but horses and cattle, and innocent, oh so innocent, of Latin! He has been thwarted and embittered; his skill and inventiveness have been hampered; he has been taught to hate things good and lovely in themselves; his time has been wasted, but he has *not* learned Latin. Healthy, prosperous, enterprising, a pioneer among men, the Boy and Nature have outmastered the masters.

Are we then in these days of higher education to have less arithmetic, grammar, classics, etc.? No! we must have more. It would scarcely be possible to have *less*. We teach and teach, and the girls listen and learn, with spectacles many of them, because their eyes are wearing out; and yet, when the last examination is over, what happens? There they walk, hundreds of them, in the streets of our large towns, each with a little packet of books in a strap. Stop them, ask to look; the flimsiest, trashiest, most unwholesome novels. With these they feed their poor, starved imaginations; with these they strive to forget all the good and useful things you have taught them at school. And whose fault is it? Well, not theirs. We have resisted Nature's claim. We have never allowed them time or space to develop here a gift of art, there a love of science, in this girl the desire to write, in another the longing to cook, in *all* the right to play or rest. What might have been tastes are distastes; what should have been cherished is despised. On the veriest garbage they take now their fill and *forget*. So Nature

revenges herself on those who think that though every living being is provided with all the necessary instincts for development and self-preservation, the human child alone has been neglected and overlooked, and must not have even one poor little hour or so a day in which to educate itself.

Teaching is not like weaving or building; the longer you weave the greater your web, the more you build the more numerous your houses. No, it is more like seed-sowing; the soil must be well prepared, the seeds must not be sown too thickly, you must give them time and space and rest, and there will be an abundance of plants that will blossom, bear fruit and scatter fresh seed on and on for ever. But, crowd your seeds, gather before time has had a chance to ripen, a miserable, sickly, rootless, fruitless growth which a year or two converts into a barren waste, is your only result. There is always a point in teaching beyond which the more you teach the less is known. For girls under fourteen three hours a day are more profitable than five, two than six, one than seven. Ah, could I only convince you!

At once roses would bloom in the cheeks of poor, pallid, worn-out women-teachers; at once eyes that are dim would grow bright and clear; at once a heavy weight of depression would be lifted from the young human life of to-day; at once our girls would be stronger and more loveable and better prepared for life!

(To be continued.)